

WIRRAL COUNCIL

SOCIAL CARE, HEALTH AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 19th JUNE 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES

NORTH WEST AMBULANCE SERVICE: REGIONAL JOINT COMMITTEE AND WIRRAL PILOT

Executive Summary

This report identifies proposals to reduce the number of ambulance 999 control rooms in North West Ambulance Service. North West overview and scrutiny committees have been contacted to identify whether they wish to join a joint committee to scrutinise these proposals. It also notifies the Committee of a pilot scheme NWAS is to carry out on Wirral.

1 Background

- 1.1 In December 2006, North West health overview and scrutiny committees (OSCs) were approached by North West Ambulance Service to attend a meeting to discuss proposals to reconfigure its control rooms within the wider context of its service strategy and the modernisation of ambulance services, including improving response times. The specific proposals were to reduce the number of 999 control rooms from four to three. Control rooms at Manchester, Liverpool and Preston would continue, and 999 call taking would cease in Cumbria. NWAS have indicated that this does not mean that the Cumbria office will close. The rationale for the proposals is in appendix 1.
- 1.2 Following the meeting with NWAS, health OSCs were contacted to identify whether they considered this to be a substantial variation or development warranting the establishment of a joint committee.
- 1.3 The Chair and spokespersons of Wirral Social Care Health and Inclusion Committee considered this and indicated that further information was needed. A response was submitted to the co-ordinating OSC suggesting that the positive impacts of the proposals on standards of service for ambulance service users should be identified; also whether there were any potential negative impacts on the standards of service within Cumbria and Lancashire or across the North West.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 The health overview and scrutiny committees at Blackpool, Lancashire and Cumbria Councils consider that the proposals amount to a substantial change and intend to establish a joint scrutiny committee to look into the

matter in more detail. In addition to the control room issue, the health OSCs at Blackpool and Lancashire also took into account NWAS's wider service strategy document and considered that the proposals contained therein also amounted to a substantial variation of service. In view of that, they intend that these proposals will form part of the wider issues being considered by the joint committee. (The strategy document is in appendix 2.)

- 2.2 The Councils intending to set up a joint committee have contacted the other North West OSCS to ask them to formally consider whether in their view the proposals amount to a substantial change to service, and whether they wish to form part of the joint committee.

3 Wirral Pilot

NWAS have also contacted Wirral to inform the OSC that this summer they are to undertake a pilot described as follows: 'A pilot to decide the most appropriate resource to convey the patient to hospital either by appropriately qualified staff of the emergency paramedic service or high dependency service. The pilot will also capture audit data through attending Paramedics who have been trained in additional patient assessment, treatment and referral skills to provide evidence to support pilot outcomes and feasibility of future alternative response strategy.' NWAS have indicated that additional resources will be allocated to Wirral for the period of the pilot. NWAS have offered to attend the Committee to discuss the pilot if this would be helpful.

4 Conclusion

The overall direction of the NWAS strategy is set by national policy for improving ambulance services. However NWAS will be undertaking a number of specific changes stemming from the strategy in the coming months and years. Overview and scrutiny committees will need to determine whether changes constitute substantial variations. One approach would be for NWAS to continue with informal briefings to advise on the progress of the strategy and for OSCs to consider issues on a case by case basis; this would include identifying whether developments relate to the whole region or to specific areas.

5 Financial and Staffing Implications

This information is likely to arise from NWAS's more detailed business case.

6 Equal Opportunities Implications

None immediately arising from this report. However, it is likely that the OSCs in the North of the region are concerned about the control rooms being less aware of the needs and locations of remote rural areas in Cumbria.

7 Human Rights Implications

None immediately arising from this report.

8 Local Agenda 21 Implications

None immediately arising from this report.

9 Community Safety Implications

None immediately arising from this report.

10 Planning Implications

None arising from this report.

11 Local Member Support Implications

Ambulance services cover the whole of the Borough.

12 Background Papers

The Service Strategy and Vision, and Reconfiguration proposals are attached as appendices.

13 Recommendations

13.1 That Committee considers whether it wishes to join a North West Joint Committee to consider proposals for changes to North West Ambulance Service.

13.2 That Committee makes a formal response.

13.3 That Committee indicates whether it would like further information on the Wirral pilot.

KEVIN MILLER
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